

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Political geography has profoundly shaped state formation and electoral politics. Throughout history, centralized states have had to contest with communities living in difficult terrains as they formed isolated communities that resisted easy integration. Mountains, deserts, jungles, and far-flung islands often became refuges of autonomy or rebellion as they lied on fringes of state control.

Mountain people have consistently demonstrated they do not want to live under the rule of outsiders, or often, even share a government with lowlanders

- Hammes, 2017.

As a result many such regions remained only loosely incorporated into pre-modern states. Over time modern states seeking territorial consolidation and national integration have had to devise special policies to incorporate these peripheral areas. They've tried to introduce

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Electoral Politics of India

2.1.1 Post Independence Era

From 1952 to 1967, the Indian political landscape was largely dominated by the Congress party. This was due to Congress being the face of Indian struggle against the British rule (Shastri, 1991). Congress established a political hegemony as Kothari, 1967 pointed out it being an “umbrella organization”. In this system Congress party formed a coalition featuring representatives from all castes, religions and ethnicities to account for the diverse interests in India (Anand, 2015). It formed a careful system of checks and balances to account for these groups and resolve disagreements. Kothari, 1967 also called it as a “party of consensus” as it tried to emulate the diversity of India in the party so that the internal factionalism within the Congress served as a mechanism for balancing power and addressing various societal demands. However, some factions felt that their demands were not being listened to and felt alienated from the decision process. This led to the rise of smaller groups with distinct identities unlike Congress who advocated for a collective nation building (Shastri, 2003). Congress’s inclusion of various sectors was symbolic and it was headed by elite leaders only. The Congress system did help democratic ideas grow and let society try out changes safely but it wasn’t good enough for full-blown competition in politics with big social changes (Shastri et al., 2009). It can be classified as a system of uni polar hegemony where deep social changes are not possible. As a result, Congress faced its biggest challenge from Lok Dal in the 1960s (DeSouza & Sridharan, 2006). Post independence, India was divided into two parts due to partition which laid the foundation of India’s divide on the basis of religion. This, along with rising tensions between different castes led to the formation of new “identities” and the rise of identity politics in India.

2.1.2 Rise of Identity Politics in the Northern Plains

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Heyes, 2024) defines identity politics as

A tendency for people of a particular religion, ethnic group, social background, etc., to form exclusive political alliances, moving away from traditional broad-based party politics.

In India, identities were formed on the basis of caste, religion, language, ethnicity etc. These identities started gaining momentum in 1960s which led to the State Reorganization Commission which divided Punjab in Haryana (a Hindi-speaking, Hindu-majority state) and transferred a few areas to Himachal Pradesh (“The Punjab Reorganisation Act”, 1966). It is interesting to note Congress’s support base. In 1980, the Congress won 50 of the 79 reserved Scheduled Caste constituencies and 29 of the 37 Scheduled Tribe constituencies but it also carried the prosperous sections of New Delhi. Congress heterogeneous support group gave it power in various states but also made it fragile at the same time. It was difficult to maintain such a support group in different sects of society and with each iteration of elections and rise of state parties, Congress kept losing its base. The rise of Janata party in the 1970s and introduction of Mandal commission led to rise of a “Market, Mandir and Mandal” politics in India (Yadav, 1999). The differing caste politics forced parties to adapt their strategies regionally and social engineering became key. For example in UP in recent elections the BJP’s candidate selection included many OBCs (including non-Yadav OBC groups like Kurmi, Lodh, Jat, Gujjar) and Dalits, alongside upper castes (Jaffrelot & Verniers, 2012). In Bihar BSP despite its Dalit core base, started wooing Brahmins since the 2000s (“Brahmin-Dalit bhaichara” committees) to expand its appeal (Ankit, 2018). These identities were not limited to caste only. In Punjab, religious identity (closely tied with linguistic and regional identity) has been central but took a different trajectory. Even after the state reorganisation commission, unresolved issues like the status of Chandigarh and sharing of river waters increased tensions (Padhiari & Ballabh, 2008). This led to rise of separatist movement in the 1980s and a separate “Sikh” identity which is still a part of politics led to rise of communalism in Punjab (Gupta, 1985). These identities often mixed with each other too. This was noticed in Bihar during 1990s after the implementation of Mandal Commission which caused a huge backlash from the upper castes. This coincided with the rise of Ram Janambhoomi movement too and was termed as “Mandal vs Kamandal” politics by analysts (Roy & Doshi, 2024).

2.1.3 Politics in Northern Mountains of India

Most mountain states in India were formed after separating from plain states and were slowly incorporated in India. A lot of North-Eastern mountain states were given a state status under the “The North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act”, 1971. Politics in Himachal Pradesh is dominated by upper castes as Rajputs and Brahmins together constituting about 50% of the population. However the politics in both Himachal and Uttarakhand does not revolve around caste. Instead, it revolves around a regional distinct identity i.e. “pahari” identity (Mishra, 2000). However it doesn’t mean that caste based politics is absent in Northern Mountains. The

formation of Uttarakhand was triggered by opposition to job reservations for OBCs from the plains being applied to hill districts in the 1990s (Mishra, 2000). Uttarakhand had less than 2% of people as OBCs and were worried that the application of 27% reservation in hills would lead to plain people taking there jobs. Hence, caste acted as a catalyst to trigger the formation of Uttarakhand. Sikkim transitioned from a monarchy to become the state of India after a referendum held on April 14, 1975 (CODE, 1979). Mountain states were often given special status like the Autonomous district councils designed to provide self-governance to preserve and promote the cultural and social practices of indigenous communities (Pautunthang, 2024). A lot of tribes in North East were given SC/ST status too. The Assam province inherited from the British initially included much of the region (except Manipur, Tripura, Sikkim). However, tensions emerged as Assam advocated for Assamese to be its sole state language under the Assam Official Language Act of 1960. Soon, calls of new separate hill districts began and hill leaders started to rally massive support under them (Inoue, 2005). The formation of All Party Hill Leaders Conference legitimized the movement and the struggle officially started. Nagaland was the first state to be formed in 1962 after a decade of violent insurgency. However, scholars have presented that formation of Naga state was due to India's war with China. A section of Naga leaders initially lobbied for joining the Union of Burma (which had its own Naga tribes and a more federal arrangement at the time), though this did not materialize (Wouters, 2023). Northeast was viewed as a strategic frontier where local unrest had to be quelled swiftly (Johari, 1975). In 1972, Meghalaya was formed as a response to the movement for Garo and Khasi hills. Manipur and Tripura, which had both been princely states that merged into India were also given statehood in 1972. However, Manipur saw violent uprisings due to various reasons which we will study later. Arunachal Pradesh (formerly NEFA) was awarded full statehood in 1987. It followed a different trajectory as it was under Elvin Verrier where he advocated for isolationist policies and slow integration of NEFA in India while respecting tribal rights (Das, 2008). However after the 1962 war, the Indian state began increasing its influence in the region due to its proximity with China claiming it to be a part of South Tibet. Thus, Arunachal's statehood (1987) was as much an international statement rather a response to local demand (the movement for statehood there was minimal compared to other states).

2.2 Duverger's law

2.2.1 Duverger's law around the world

Duverger's law has been a part of various debates around the world and has found it to be applicable in the USA (Republicans vs Democrats) and UK (Conservatives v/s Labour). In UK, smaller parties like Liberal Democrats Party often receive a decent vote share but almost no parties. Originally, it was presented only as a theory but with time many mathematical proofs have emerged to prove it. Palfrey, 1989 presented a mathematical proof of Duverger's

Law under strategic voting conditions using game theoretic models. Cox, 1997 presented a study where he offered a general theory and proof of Duverger’s law. He presented an $M + 1$ rule. The $M + 1$ rule argued that in a district with M representatives and system where person with most votes wins with no propositional representations, no more than $M + 1$ candidates would exist. In case of Duverger’s law $M = 1$, hence it predicts at most 2 parties. Duverger’s law has often been studied as static i.e. the equilibrium has remained for a long time. Studies by Forand and Maheshri, 2015 showed how countries move toward or away from the Duvergerian equilibrium over time. They show that strategic behavior can lead to convergence toward two-party competition over time if any unexpected shocks don’t happen. This is specially important in the context of the thesis as we explore whether states converge to Duverger’s law over time slowly.

Duverger’s law has been noted in countries where the voting system has changed providing a natural experiment. In New Zealand, it had a two-party system (National vs. Labour) under FPTP (First past the post) for two decades. After 1996 it switched to a mixed-member proportional (MMP) system. This resulted in smaller parties gaining representation proportionately to their votes and New Zealand became a multi party system (Eberhard, 2017). The opposite happened in Italy where they switched from a PR system to adopting a largely plurality-based mixed system in the 1990s. This led to there party system changed from being a highly fragmented multi-party system to a dual party competition (Reed, 2001). Essentially, parties merged or formed pre-electoral alliances to avoid splitting the vote in the districts. Similarly, Japan shifted from a single non transferable vote (SNTV) system (multi-member districts) to a mixed system with single member districts in 1994. Under SNTV, Japan had one party dominance (the LDP) but also multiple smaller parties and intra party factional competition. Under the new system, the party system reorganized into roughly two major blocs (LDP vs. opposition) in many districts (Reed, 2007).

However, there have been critiques of the Duvergiers law. It doesn’t follow in India and Canada (Gaines, 1999). The case for Indian exceptionalism will be elaborated later. Even though the law is studied on a national level, Duverger himself presented that the law is best understood at a district level (Diwakar, 2007). There have been limits of strategic voting (the psychological effect) in explaining the Duverger’s law. Different reasons have been found to do so. In some cases, people vote for there preferred party to express there protest (Ziegfeld, 2021). Coordination failures (where supporters of an alternative can’t agree on which major party to back) or protest voting can lead to more than two significant parties even under FPTP (Singer, 2013). Duverger’s law has resulted in limiting voter’s choice marginalizing minority voices, and polarizing politics into two ideologies. Mathematically it has been formulated that duverger’s law often leads to parties having the same ideology or completely polarizing opposing ideologies (Fey, 2007). However, in practice it has been seen that parties often converge to

similar ideologies because polarizing ideologies often lead to rise of a median party. Hence, it leaves very little practical choice for the voters.

2.2.2 Duverger's law in India

First attempt to study Duverger's law in India was done by Riker, 1976, 1982 where he explained the Congress Umbrella in India and postulated that India follows Duverger's law. However, India's divergence from Duverger's law was first presented by Lijphart, 1994 as he argued that Congress was in a special position due to them being a figurehead of India's independence movement. He argued that India's vast social diversity, including various ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups would lead to social cleavages and predicted the rise of smaller regional parties. Sridharan, 1997; Taagepera and Shugart, 1989 also presented the same rational as above and predicted a rise of local parties. The first statistical analysis on India specifically is done by Chhibber and Kollman, 1998 who presented in an extended analysis that India follows the Duverger's law and reported the India's ENP at the time to be 2.5. In an extended study, they first studied the Indian districts and presented that India's districts followed Duverger's law (Chhibber & Kollman, 2009).

2.3 Mountains Different from Plains

2.3.1 World wide

Geography has had a major impact on political attitudes and behaviors, shaping communities and lives through its pervasive influence. Beyond commerce, this geographical advantage helped the British win wars in both medieval and modern eras, establishing the nation as a superpower (Young, 1987). These don't need to be nationwide as in Chicago the demographic composition of passengers on Chicago's Red Line train visibly shifts along racial lines as it travels from the northern to the southern neighborhoods. These physical separations create "psychological distance" amplifies existing tensions and adds to biases leading to larger movements for more representation (Kasperson, 1965). Similar geographical influences were observed during the Cold War, when the proximity of Cuba and Nicaragua to the United States posed significant threats due to the spread of communism in America's "backyard". Hence, we can observe how geography has influenced the macro processes of countries or unions building or destroying the world. The isolation of the Soviet Union and Japan from their counterparts contributed to their respective downfalls. The influence of geography on politics extends beyond international relations and can be observed in different ways.

Geography has also worked as an escape zone for various people in the past who wanted to escape the control of monarchies or colonial power. These geographical divides have often led to rise of resistant movements across the world. In the Americas, Maroon communities

consisted of escaped slaves often living in hard to reach areas like mountains or dense forests resisting colonial control. Their descendants emerged as a form of resistance to slavery (Price, 2020). They created resilient communities in inaccessible regions such as mountains, swamps, and dense forests. Jamiacan Maroons forced the British to sign treaties and Suriname Maroons persisted despite state pressure (M, n.d.). Geography helped the black, Indigenous, queer and poor people to escape the dominant system where they were not accepted. They were called “undercommons” and used cracks in societies like universities to escape the state control (Harney & Moten, 2013). Anthropologist studies have shown how remote communities have tried to avoid centralized authority and are acephalous (headless) in nature (Graeber, 2004). Examples like Tiv of Nigeria and the Piaroa of Venezuela show how they avoided power in one hand. Tsimihety of Madagascar illustrates how they evaded both monarchy and colonial rule through strategies of withdrawal and dispersal. Authors have argued that instead of being backward or primitive, these societies are stateless by choice. Using technology to there advantage along with legal and international avenues many small communities have exercised there right to remain in isolation (Bodley, 2012, 2014). Bodley develops the idea of “adaptive governments” which are based on consensus systems to defend against larger corporations. Vandana Shiva presents how small scale farming systems allow communities to resist corporate and state control over food systems (Hrynkow, 2018). She argues that “seed sovereignty” is very important for farmers as it allows them to be independent and self reliant. These tribes also practiced such farming practices to evade state control. The above examples clearly show that geography in terms of forests, swamps, mountains have clearly played an important role for people to run away from state control. Southeast Asia is home to some of the world’s tallest mountains like the Himalayas and is also the region where “Zomia” is located.

2.3.2 Zomia

Chapter 3

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3.1 Introduction

3.2 Duvergers Law

Maurice Duverger, a prominent French political scientist introduced a principle in the mid-20th century that has since become foundational in the study of electoral systems. Duverger's law states that electoral systems that follow a single-member plurality system (SMPS) such as India where the winner takes all tend to result in the dominance of two major political parties. Popular examples for this are the USA and UK elections, where this has been observed. However, this is not a firm law as it does not hold in India and Canada. Two primary mechanisms have been identified through which electoral systems influence party structures in relation to Duvergers law:

1. Mechanical effect: In a single member plurality system, the party receiving the most votes wins. This means that the smaller parties often struggle to secure representation. This process causes over representation of larger parties and under representation of smaller parties leading to a concentration of political competition between two dominant parties. Often, Duverger's law has been used to study national level competitions but the essence of this law has been often identified on district level (Cox, 1997; Gallagher, 1991; Lijphart, 1994; Rae, 1971). Increase in competition between multiple parties at a district level indicates a higher competition at national level too.
2. Psychological effect: This is a direct response to the mechanical effect by the voters and political elites. For example, knowing that smaller parties have little chance of winning, voters avoid wasting their votes on them, instead opting for one of the major contenders. Similarly, political elites may choose not to enter the race under unfavorable conditions or may form coalitions to enhance their viability.

The distinction between mechanical effect and psychological effect might seem blurred at first but it is important to note that there can be various reasons for voters responding to the

mechanical effect. Mechanical factor can be measured using various magnitudes like the Laakso and Taagpara index (Laakso & Taagepera, 1979) or the Golosov index (Golosov, 2010) but it is often difficult to quantify the psychological effect. The psychological effect is not limited solely to the example mentioned above and there can be various reasons for the mechanical effect, which can often be difficult to measure. For example information flow may influence this dominance and more than two parties may emerge in single member plurality systems even when all voters are strategic (Clough, 2007). Hence, it is important to note that

Strategic voting can be often used to explain the results of Duverger’s law. It has been useful in explaining the psychological reasons behind the rise of Duverger’s law. A party can manage to garner a lot of support from its constituency and still lose by a minor margin. Votes for minor parties can potentially be regarded as splitting votes away from the major parties. To counteract this, voters often engage in “strategic voting” which occurs when voters make choices based on electoral expectations rather than sincere preferences (Bol & Verthe, 2019). This behavior can take various forms, such as deserting small parties for larger ones or vice versa, depending on the electoral system. More on this will be covered later, keeping the Indian context in mind.

3.3 The Indian Case

The Congress party system (Candland, 1997; Kothari, 1967) was a massive umbrella organisation observed in 1950s and 1960s as Congress originally founded to fight for reforms under British rule, the Congress evolved into a mass organization that led India to independence. It became a massive umbrella organisation to accommodate different groups that in some cases conflicted with each other and hence became a system of checks and balances allowing them to maintain a median position in India. Thus, a two party system was observed and Duverger’s law was being followed (Riker, 1982). Since the 1970s, India’s political landscape has seen the emergence of identity-based parties and increasing party fragmentation among congress as Congress started to lose its hegemony. The INC split in 1969, resulting in the Congress (O) and Congress (R). The latter, led by Indira Gandhi, adopted more populist policies including the nationalization of banks and the abolition of privy purses. (Ramachandra Guha, 2011). These measures aimed to address economic disparities but also led to centralization of power within the party. The traditional umbrella party structure found it challenging to maintain its dominance as deepening of these social divisions. Concurrently, identity-based political movements gained momentum (Farooqui & Sridharan, 2016). The rise of the Dalit Panthers in Maharashtra during the early 1970s exemplified this trend. Inspired by the Black Panther movement in the United States, the Dalit Panthers sought to combat caste-based discrimination and were instrumental in bringing Dalit issues to the forefront of regional politics. The 1970s also concluded the formation of North Eastern states in India. States such as Meghalaya, Manipur, and Tripura were granted

statehood in 1972, followed by Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram in 1987. Nevertheless, these states participated in the lok sabha elections post 1975.

Following on these studies, this study will use both lok sabha and assembly level constituencies to perform its analysis. This will give us a true essence of Duvergers law and more will be elaborated in the following sections.

3.4 Dataset

The Indo-Gangetic plains serve as a relevant comparative base for analysis as many mountain states were carved out of the plains regions through various reorganization processes. A notable example is Himachal Pradesh which underwent reorganisation in 1966 following the recommendations of the States Reorganisation Commission. The contemporary political geography of the Northeast was finalized in 1975 with Sikkim's incorporation into India. The data for the analysis is compiled from the Election commission of India and the timeframe is set from 1977 to 2014. The year 1977 is chosen because almost all mountain states (except Uttarakhand) were formed by then.

The Indo-Gangetic Plains encompass several states and territories: Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Delhi, Chandigarh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, and Assam (not a part of indo gangetic plains but part of Brahmaputra plains). For this study, Jharkhand's share of seats have also been counted as a part of Bihar. For Northern mountains we include the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura, and Uttarakhand. This analysis deliberately excludes Jammu and Kashmir due to its complex geopolitical situation and the presence of international actors has created unique political dynamics that would confound the geographic comparison being studied. Also owing to its special status, lack of complete data and political debate around it due to the now scrapped Article 370 which was active during our period of study. Article 370 gave the state a separate constitution, a state flag, and autonomy of internal administration which was unlike any other state and hence clubbing it with the rest of the mountain states would be unfavourable. We also identified the constituencies in the state of Uttarakhand before it separated from Uttar Pradesh in 2000 and incorporated them to analyse the behavior of uttarakhand before the formation of the state and removed the same constituencies from Uttar Pradesh which are Almora, Garhwal, Hardwar, Nainital, Tehri Garhwal. For assembly elections the constituencies are: Uttar Kashi, Badri Kedar, Naini Tal, Laksar, Mussoorie, Khatima, Chakrata, Roorkee, Didihat, Bageshwar, Pithoragarh, Dehradun, Lansdowne, Devprayag, Haldwani, Ranikhet, Almora, Hardwar, Pauri, Karanprayag, Kashipur, Tehri.

Assembly-level constituency data is also sourced from the Election Commission of India. Unlike Lok Sabha elections, which take place simultaneously across all states, assembly elections

follow separate cycles for each state. This makes it challenging to aggregate and analyze them in the same way. To address this, we group assembly elections within a five-year window and align them to the nearest benchmark year—1975, 1980, 1985, 1990, 1995, 2000, 2005, and 2010. This allows us to identify overall trends more effectively.

The differences between mountainous and plain regions are rooted in fundamental structural distinctions that shape societal dynamics (J. C. Scott, 2009). To better understand these variations we study social indicators related to the gender dynamics. For this analysis, we use data from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) which is a nationwide survey that has had five major iterations—in 1992, 1998, 2005, 2015, and 2019. The NFHS consists of two primary datasets:

- The household dataset provides insights into household composition, living conditions, access to basic amenities, asset ownership, and broad health indicators for all household members.
- The individual dataset offers more granular demographic, health, and lifestyle data. In the 1992 and 1998 iterations, this dataset focused exclusively on married women aged 15–49. From 2005 onward, the scope expanded to include women (15–49 years), men (15–54 years), and children under five.

In our analysis, we primarily examine the individual dataset of women to assess the extent of freedom across different regions. This evaluation is based on various parameters, which will be detailed further in the methodology section.

To analyze women’s literacy at the state level, data from Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India, 1991, 2001, 2011 has been utilized, along with literacy data from the National Statistical Commission, India, 2017.

3.5 Methodology

3.5.1 Duverger’s law

To operationalize duverger’s law, we can count the total number of parties participating in the constituency. However, this can produce false results as we need to find the major parties and the votes received by each party should be given some weight in the analysis. Instead, we use Laakso and Taagepera Index (Laakso & Taagepera, 1979) to calculate the effective number of parties in a constituency. The formula is

$$N = \frac{1}{\sum_{i=1}^n p_i^2}$$

where N is the total number of political parties and p_i is the proportion of votes obtained by party i , p_i is calculated separately for each party within each constituency and weighs party by their relative strength, ensuring larger parties are given more weight than the smaller. In assessing the presence of a two-party system, the ideal value of ENP should be 2 which shows that there are two major parties in the constituency. Since the number can be non integer as well, this study employs an ENP threshold of 2.5 which has been used in various methodological frameworks established by Laakso and Taagepera, Diwakar, and Chhibber. Additionally a softer threshold of 3.0 is considered as a soft cutoff for analysis which has also been used in the above frameworks. This analysis employs both ENP thresholds to evaluate district level party competition, with the state level ENP calculated as the mean of district level values, following Diwakar’s methodological approach. For each state the mean is calculated for every year and plotted on a graph along with the best fit line for each state to indicate a general trend. A best fit line, also known as a line of best fit or regression line, is a straight line that best represents the relationship between two variables in a scatter plot.

Let’s assume a line is represented as $y = mx + b$ where m is the slope of the line and b is the y-intercept (where the line crosses the y-axis). To find the best fit for each actual data point calculate the vertical distance (residual) between the point and the proposed line. These distances are squared (to make all values positive and give more weight to larger errors).

$$m = \frac{\sum((x_i - \bar{x})(y_i - \bar{y}))}{\sum((x_i - \bar{x})^2)} \quad (3.1)$$

$$b = \bar{y} - m\bar{x} \quad (3.2)$$

Where \bar{y} represents the mean of all y-values and (x_i, y_i) represents a point. It is used to observe a general trend of the ENP values, i.e., whether mean ENP values of a state are diverging or converging towards two over time.

3.5.2 NFHS Dataset

3.5.2.1 Description of Parameters

The NFHS dataset has been done in 5 iterations from 1992 to 2019. To study NFHS, we use women’s empowerment as a process through which individuals gain greater control over their lives, encompassing both access to resources and the ability to make autonomous decisions. Following this framework, to operationalize empowerment we use three key indicators: contraceptive use, literacy levels, and breastfeeding practices.

1. Child Marriage: Child marriage is defined as the formal marriage or informal union before the age of 18. Early marriage can mean a girl’s transition from being a child/adolescent to an adult which often happens before the legal age of marriage in India. According to van

Geffen, 2023, the mean age of first marriage for women has increased from 16.8 in 1992 to 18.9 in 2022. The mean age of marriage became over 18 for the first time in 2012. Early marriage forces women to take over adult responsibilities early and even reproduce. This often burdens them with responsibilities for which they are largely unprepared and can often limit their ambitions. Child marriage often takes away the autonomy for women to make their own decisions. When girls marry later they tend to have better health, partake more in decision-making and have better economic prospects. NFHS data shows that more than 50% women got married before the age of 18 during the 1990s. It is important to study this as it is used as a parameter to study the girl's ability to make independent decisions regarding her personal life and can be used as a proxy indicator for women's agency to dictate their life.

2. **Contraceptive Use as an Indicator of Decision-Making Autonomy:** The Indian government itself has said the principle of “the rights of couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children and to have the information and means to do so” (Pachauri, 2014). A lack of contraceptive use can suggest that women are not able to exercise this principle due to opposition from laws, lack of availability or the social pressure to be fertile. Previous research suggests that high contraceptive prevalence correlates with greater female agency, as access to contraception allows women to control fertility outcomes independently (Kishor & Gupta, 2004). The official question asked in the survey is “Percent distribution of currently married women by contraceptive method currently used“. Studies have also shown that there is an increase demand for contraception to delay first pregnancy among young married women but there is a limited amount who are able to do so (Jejeebhoy et al., 2014). This can be due to social/cultural reasons as women might be pressured to not use contraception or forced to conceive. Hence, this metric often tells us about the women's agency in family planning and a rising trend can suggest an increase in women's autonomy too.

3. **Literacy as a Source of Empowerment:** Under Article 21-A of Indian Constitution primary education is a fundamental for children from age 6 to 14. According to the Census of 1991, the definition of literacy is “The total percentage of the population of an area at a particular time aged seven years or above who can read and write with understanding.“ Literacy is calculated by asking every citizen age 6 and above ‘Can (NAME) read and write?’. While literacy is effected due to economical status and access, it is not the only reason. A large number women are denied education due to cultural reasons too. This is especially evident in higher levels of education. Higher literacy also shows women can be more independent and can exercise their autonomy easily. Higher literacy also means more financial independence and better jobs. Studies have shown that higher literacy is also correlated with lower fertility rate and better family planning (Kumar et al., 2022). Lower

literacy often leads to women being dependent on others, generally the husband/father leading to higher chances of exploitation. Hence, it can be argued that literacy rates serve as a proxy for empowerment and access to information.

4. **Breastfeeding Practices as an Indicator of Maternal Agency:** Breastfeeding might not feel like a conventional indicator initially. However, the ability of a mother to breastfeed is tied to her autonomy, knowledge and the support she receives. In many Indian households feeding children like giving them food, water, solid food etc is influenced by elders and cultural norms. A woman who is empowered and who has a say in childcare decisions can insist on breastfeeding despite traditional pressures for early supplementation. Studies have also shown how maternal autonomy, financial independence positively impacts breastfeeding practices (Shroff et al., 2011). Breastfeeding even after the initial 6 months also indicates the support women are getting from their families and the proper nutrients to do so. Analyzing breastfeeding patterns provides insights into the degree of autonomy exercised by women and the amount of support they are getting in maternal and child health decisions (Delawarde-Saïas* et al., 2024). The official question in NFHS 1-2 is “Receiving breast milk and solid/mushy food to children aged 6-9 months”. For NFHS-3 to 5 the official question is “Receiving breast milk and solid/mushy food to children aged 6-23 months”.

3.5.2.2 Ranking Methodology

The methodology for ranking states based on women’s empowerment involves taking the 3 distinct indicators or groups of indicators. These indicators serve as proxies for measuring empowerment levels across states in India as explained above. Each state is ranked individually on these indicators, which are further categorized under three broader dimensions of empowerment. The ranking methodology is relatively straightforward, as it assumes that all indicators carry equal weight and does not adjust for differences in magnitude between ranks. This means that while the rankings provide a comparative snapshot of empowerment levels, they do not quantify the extent of variation between states. Nonetheless, this method effectively highlights relative disparities in women’s empowerment across states. A lower numerical rank signifies higher empowerment, making it easier to identify which states exhibit stronger indicators of women’s agency and autonomy.

Although there are various questions in NFHS 1998 and onwards, there is a limited amount of questions in 1992. The questions of 1992 give us an insight in the late 80s era too and due to this limited questions are chosen to analyse the data.

3.6 Results

3.6.1 Preliminary analysis

From 1977 to 2019, there are a total of 239 mountain constituencies and 2911 plain constituencies, suggesting an imbalanced dataset. To check for distribution (whether it is normal or not and its standard deviation) a preliminary analysis is performed. The figure helps visualize the data by organizing values into small intervals (bins of intervals 0.1) and showing their density by plotting histograms. Density is used to normalize the data, making it easier to compare shapes of distributions by making the total area of all rectangles equal to one.

Statistic	Mountains	States
Mean	2.54	2.88
Median	2.31	2.71
Std. Dev.	0.82	0.83

Table 3.1 Basic Statistics

To test for significant differences between the values of mountains and plains, we divide the constituencies into two buckets. One bucket contains the constituencies of plains and the other has the mountains. Since the number of constituencies is almost in the ratio 1:12, we have imbalanced data. To account for imbalanced data Mann-Whitney U test is suitable for analysis as it is nonparametric and remains robust even with unequal sample sizes. This test compares the entire distribution between groups rather than just central tendencies, making it an appropriate choice for determining if there are significant differences between the two regions. We set the significant value α to be 0.05 and the results are in Table 3.6.1. Cohen's d is used to measure the effect size, quantifying the magnitude of the difference between two means. Both these tests particularly valuable for imbalanced datasets as they are independent of sample size. In Figure 3.6.1, it is interesting to note that the density around the value two is much higher than in the case of mountains. Moreover, the plains have a much longer tail than the mountains indicating a more flattened distribution and a distribution with more districts (percentage wise) which have effective parties greater than three.

Statistic	Value
P-value	4.84×10^{-12}
Cohen's d	-6.03

Table 3.2 Mann-Whitney U Test and Effect Size

The results show a significantly low p-value and the Cohen's d value is negative with a very high absolute value, indicating the bucket of plains is significantly greater than mountains overall with the difference being six standard deviations. A preliminary analysis also reveals that the overall mean for mountains is lower than that for plains, suggesting a difference while

following a normal distribution. However, to validate Duverger's law it is essential to examine whether the values decrease over time as clubbing all the elections together hides changes in the party system over time. To investigate this, a year-wise frequency distribution is calculated using a threshold for effective parties of 2.5 and a softer threshold of 3.

3.6.2 Duverger's law through the years

Election Year	≤ 2.0	2-2.5	2.5-3	>3
1977	45.00%	35.00%	0.00%	20.00%
1980	15.79%	31.58%	15.79%	36.84%
1984	30.00%	50.00%	10.00%	10.00%
1989	15.00%	30.00%	40.00%	15.00%
1991	25.00%	30.00%	20.00%	25.00%
1996	20.00%	25.00%	20.00%	35.00%
1998	15.00%	35.00%	15.00%	35.00%
1999	20.00%	50.00%	5.00%	25.00%
2004	20.00%	45.00%	20.00%	15.00%
2009	10.00%	40.00%	30.00%	20.00%
2014	5.00%	70.00%	10.00%	15.00%
2019	40.00%	35.00%	20.00%	5.00%

Table 3.3 Percentage Distribution of Effective Parties across districts in the Mountains

Election Year	≤ 2.0	2-2.5	2.5-3	>3
1977	58.60%	30.88%	9.12%	1.40%
1980	2.56%	23.44%	26.37%	47.62%
1984	11.23%	43.16%	22.11%	23.51%
1989	9.23%	44.65%	15.87%	30.26%
1991	1.06%	27.66%	25.89%	45.39%
1996	0.00%	25.26%	23.51%	51.23%
1998	0.35%	29.82%	28.42%	41.40%
1999	4.21%	40.00%	21.40%	34.39%
2004	1.82%	30.66%	20.80%	46.72%
2009	1.46%	29.56%	17.52%	51.46%
2014	2.19%	14.23%	24.45%	59.12%
2019	22.99%	60.58%	12.41%	4.01%

Table 3.4 Percentage distribution of Effective Parties across districts in the Indo-Gangetic Plains

In Table 3.3 and 3.4 we find percentage of districts for each election in a given range of effective parties. From a look at Tables 3.3 and 3.4 it is evident that apart from the year 1977, the percentage of districts with effective parties greater than 2.5 is always higher in the plains than in the mountain regions indicating towards a diverging trend. Duverger's law might be

at play in the mountain districts, as the percentage of effective parties with values above 2.5 and just exceeded 50% in the years of 1984, 1977 and 1996. For plains, apart from the year of 1977 all years are close to or above 50%. In 1996, 2009 and 2014, there was a gross violation of Duverger's law in plains as more than 50% of districts had more than 3 effective parties. Hence, it can be argued that there is a possibility that Duverger's law is followed in the mountains. This analysis also shows that the difference between plains and mountains is increasing with time. To test for this and also verify whether the number of effective parties converges to two over time for mountains a regression analysis is performed.

Region	State	Slope*100	Mean
Mountains	Manipur	-2.615	3.85
	Mizoram	0.470	2.32
	Himachal Pradesh	-0.713	2.17
	Meghalaya	1.237	2.42
	Nagaland	-0.474	1.85
	Tripura	-0.448	2.32
	Arunachal Pradesh	0.553	2.47
	Sikkim	1.654	1.86
	Uttarakhand	-0.558	2.78
Plains	Haryana	1.101	2.89
	Punjab	1.048	2.67
	Uttar Pradesh	0.668	3.26
	Rajasthan	-0.481	2.42
	Bihar	1.47	2.89
	West Bengal	1.546	2.47
	Assam	0.017	3.08
	NCT of Delhi	0.959	2.32

Table 3.5 State-wise Slope and Mean Data categorized into Mountains, Plains, and Others.

We find the mean of all effective parties of all districts for each state over the election years and plot them over a graph (Figures 3.6.2 and 3.6.2). Then we find the best fit line (regression analysis) and check the slope of each state over the years.

The slopes in Table 3.5 are multiplied by a factor of 100 because the change in effective parties is very gradual. In Table 3.5 of the plains and mountain states, it is evident that the slope of the best-fit lines is positive for all plain states except Rajasthan. Similarly it is negative or close to 0 for all mountainous states except meghalaya. Moreover, the y-intercepts for the plains states tend to be higher than those for the mountain states, suggesting a generally higher starting point for the effective number of parties in the plains. In contrast, the mountain states exhibit lower slopes and, in some cases, negative or near-zero slopes (e.g., Nagaland and Mizoram) implying stability or even a slight decline in the effective number of parties over time. An interesting trend is observed in Manipur where the original intercept is very high

(only state with absolute slope greater than 2) and shows a significant decrease in the effective number of parties over time which could be indicative of stronger convergence to Duverger's law. Meghalaya is the only state with a significant positive slope and shows divergence. Rest of the states either have a negative slope or a positive slope close to 0.5, indicating stability with mean less than 3 in every state except Manipur. Sikkim has a significant positive slope but it is slowly converging towards 2 as it begins from a very low number of effective parties.

The graphs (Figures 3.6.2 and 3.6.2) also show that the majority of the mountain states showed high values just after their formation and after that there is a steep dip. This is best illustrated in the case of Uttarakhand where the effective parties are very high until the formation of the state and fall drastically after the state is formed, a trend which continues in 2019 too. Uttarakhand Kranti Dal (UKD) a state party which was a strong force in the formation of Uttarakhand was completely eliminated from the assembly and lok sabha elections after the formation of the state.

The plains follow the complete opposite trend as after the formation of India in 1947, Congress was the only major party due to it being an umbrella organisation and the splitting of Congress into smaller fractions paved the way for newer parties based on identity to develop (Kothari, 1967). Apart from Rajasthan, the rest of them have an increasing slope showing divergence from the Duverger's law over time. Assam has a small slope but the mean and intercept of effective parties is consistently greater than three, grossly violating the duverger's law. All plain states show a consistent trend till 2014 and dips in 1999. To analyse the complete trend we plot the overall averages of mountains and plains in Figure 3.6.2 and plot the best fit line across them too (regression analysis). The trend shows a constant small decreasing slope.

In 2019 due to the rise of BJP there is a new party system, similar to Congress in 1950s-60s. BJP's dominance has transformed not only the party system but also the political system itself, pushing towards a Hindu majoritarian state and undermining India's traditional secularism (Jaffrelot & Verniers, 2020). Politics has become intertwined with aggressive nationalism and promoting a vision of India as an ancient ecological Hindu nation has led to the rise of a Hindu identity. The results however, show that there is a difference in the behaviour of party systems in the mountain and plain states which is show through the electoral systems of India. In the next section, we perform a qualitative review of the existing reasons of Duverger's law and explain how geography might leads to structural differences between mountains and plains which effects politics too.

Group	Slope
Mountains	-0.379
States	0.785

Table 3.6 Slopes of Mountain and State Groups (Slope is multiplied by 100)

Table 3.7 Slopes for Plains States Over the Years

Year	Slope*100
1975	2.9826
1980	3.0697
1985	2.8412
1990	3.4494
1995	3.2340
2000	3.1945
2005	3.4176
2010	3.3726

3.6.2.1 Assembly Elections

For assembly elections we do a similar analysis and calculate the same statistics.

3.6.3 NFHS Analysis

In the following section we will analyse the parameters described above and describe the results and correlations observed.

3.6.3.1 Child Marriage

State	1992	1998	2005	2015	2019	Final_Rank
Himachal Pradesh	23.2	9.2	12.3	8.5	5.4	1
Mizoram	12.6	10.8	20.5	10.2	8.4	2
Punjab	13.9	11.8	19.3	7.2	8.6	2
Manipur	14.4	9.9	12.7	13	16.4	4
Nagaland	14.9	20.7	21	13.1	5.7	5
Delhi	26.2	17.9	21.2	14	10.1	6
Uttarakhand	30.7	23.2	22.5	13.9	9.6	7
Sikkim		20.5	30.1	14.4	10.6	8
Meghalaya	26.6	24.8	24.4	16.4	19.1	9
Haryana	51.1	36.8	39.8	18.4	12	10
Arunachal Pradesh	43.4	26.6	40.6	27.2	18.8	11
Assam	43.5	36.3	37.9	32.3	31.9	12
Uttar Pradesh	54.5	57.4	53.1	18.6	14.8	13
Tripura	40.6	35.6	40.9	32.3	40.2	14
Rajasthan	61.2	59.9	57.1	29.8	21.3	15
Jharkhand	57.6	56.3	61.1	37	31.5	15
West Bengal	54.8	45.3	53.3	40.8	41.4	17
Bihar	60	58.4	60.2	39	38.7	18

Table 3.8 State Data with Final Rank for child marriages

The data in Table 3.8 suggests a clear trend of improvement across all states from 1992 to 2019 as the child marriage rates are decreasing, indicating progress in almost all the states. Himachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland, Uttarakhand, and Sikkim all rank within the top ten. Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura are the only two mountain states present in the bottom eight. Himachal Pradesh has secured the first position due to a steady and substantial decline in values over the years. Mizoram follows closely, showing consistently low values and strong improvement. In contrast, plain states display mixed performance. While Punjab and Delhi rank relatively high, states like Bihar, Rajasthan, and Jharkhand remain at the bottom despite showing progress. Overall, mountainous states tend to perform better overall as they dominate the top ranks.

3.6.3.2 Literacy

In Table 3.9 we can see that from 1991 to 2016, every state experienced a notable rise in literacy. The table 3.9 is ranked by the female literacy. Mizoram showed consistently high literacy at 82.26% in 1991 and reaching 89.4% in 2016, closely followed by Delhi, which showed a steep climb from about 62% to nearly 94%. Many mountainous or northeastern states appear near the top: Nagaland and Tripura share third place with values around 80%, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand show robust improvements (both surpassing 80% by 2016), and Sikkim moves from 46.76% to 76.43%. Plain states have showed consistently low literacy as visible that all the bottom four states are plain states and no state apart from Punjab came in the top five. Nagaland interestingly presents a nearly negligible gap (with an average difference of -0.49), implying that the female literacy rates are almost on par with the male rates. The calculated differences (Avg. Male - Avg. Female) are predominantly positive, confirming that male literacy rates tend to be higher than female rates in most regions. This, along with the fact that differential between average female and male literacy is very high in plain states. Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Rajasthan and Bihar have a differential $\geq 20\%$. Uttarakhand and Manipur are the on the highest side of differential in case of Mountains. Seven of the top ten states are mountain states with only Arunachal Pradesh in the bottom eight. There has been a greater percentage increase in the proportion of females gaining literacy in all states due to the consolidated efforts of the government. Overall, mountain states performed better than plain states in this parameter.

3.6.3.3 Breast Milk

The table 3.10 illustrates the performance of various states in terms of how much breast milk and solid/mushy food is fed to children by women. Most states display upward trends, indicating more maternal agency. Sikkim shows strong progress by 1998 as it ranks first. In contrast, states like Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, with modest or fluctuating values, fall toward the lower end of the ranking. Apart from Uttarakhand, all mountain states are present in top

State	Female Literacy (%)					Male Literacy (%)					Diff. (M-F)
	1991	2001	2011	2017	Avg.	1991	2001	2011	2017	Avg.	
Mizoram	82.26	86.75	89.27	89.40	86.92	93.35	95.00	93.35	93.72	93.86	6.94
Nagaland	61.92	76.11	76.11	80.11	73.56	61.65	66.59	82.75	83.29	73.07	-0.49
Tripura	49.56	73.19	82.73	83.15	72.16	81.47	91.53	92.53	92.18	89.43	17.27
Himachal Pradesh	52.13	67.42	75.93	80.50	69.00	75.36	85.35	89.53	92.90	85.79	16.79
Punjab	50.41	63.55	70.73	78.50	65.80	65.66	75.23	80.44	88.50	77.46	11.66
Uttarakhand	52.28	60.26	70.01	80.70	65.81	86.60	92.00	87.40	94.30	90.08	24.27
Sikkim	46.76	60.40	75.61	76.43	64.80	76.73	86.55	86.55	87.29	84.28	19.48
West Bengal	48.64	60.22	70.54	76.10	63.88	73.00	77.58	81.69	84.80	79.77	15.89
Manipur	47.60	60.53	70.26	73.17	62.39	86.49	90.00	83.58	86.49	86.14	23.75
Meghalaya	44.85	59.61	72.89	73.78	62.78	60.65	65.43	75.95	77.17	69.80	7.02
Assam	43.03	56.03	66.27	81.20	61.63	61.87	71.28	77.85	90.10	75.28	13.65
Haryana	40.48	56.31	65.94	71.30	58.51	69.10	84.06	84.06	88.00	81.31	22.80
Arunachal Pradesh	29.69	44.24	57.70	59.50	47.28	51.50	64.07	72.55	73.40	65.38	18.10
Uttar Pradesh	25.31	42.22	57.18	63.40	47.03	55.73	68.82	77.28	81.80	70.41	23.38
Jharkhand	25.50	39.38	55.42	64.70	46.75	67.94	78.45	76.84	83.00	76.56	29.81
Rajasthan	20.44	43.85	52.12	57.60	43.00	54.99	75.70	79.19	80.80	72.17	29.17
Bihar	22.89	33.12	51.50	60.50	42.00	59.68	60.32	71.20	79.70	67.73	25.73

Table 3.9 Male and Female Literacy Rates in Indian States (1991-2017) with Difference

State	1992	1998	2005	2015	2019	Final Rank
Sikkim	–	87.3	70.1	49.9	54.7	1
Manipur	50	86.8	55.3	36.9	39.0	2
Meghalaya	56.3	77.1	35.3	45.4	51.0	2
West Bengal	53.6	46.3	58.7	36.6	50.7	4
Mizoram	64.3	74.2	35.0	41.2	33.7	5
Himachal Pradesh	39.9	61.3	69.2	24.5	31.1	6
Tripura	65.0	–	56.8	15.1	25.6	7
Arunachal Pradesh	35.8	60.2	33.8	33.3	40.0	8
Nagaland	43.5	81.3	27.7	33.2	21.8	9
Delhi	25.1	37.0	51.5	24.1	30.8	10
Assam	39.2	58.5	32.7	27.8	23.4	11
Punjab	37.3	38.7	39.9	15.6	26.7	12
Uttarakhand	–	–	47.9	19.8	20.6	13
Haryana	38.5	41.8	31.3	16.4	21.7	14
Bihar	18.1	15.0	34.9	16.8	19.6	15
Uttar Pradesh	19.4	17.3	36.1	9.8	15.2	16
Jharkhand	–	–	28.5	13.8	21.2	17
Rajasthan	9.4	17.5	20.8	8.5	16.3	18

Table 3.10 States with Final Rank for Breast Milk

10. Only West Bengal comes on rank 4 among all the mountain states. Overall, the mountain states clearly outperform the plain states in this case. Studies have shown that higher maternal self-efficacy and positive ideational factors (such as accurate knowledge about the benefits of breastfeeding and confidence in one's ability to nurse) are closely associated with improved breastfeeding practices. This indirectly measures the agency of a mother in her decision on health and care (Anaba et al., 2022)

3.6.3.4 Contraceptive Data

Table 3.11 Contraceptive Data

State	1992	1998	2005	2015	2019	Final_Rank
West Bengal	57.4	66.6	71.2	70.9	74.4	1
Himachal Pradesh	58.4	67.7	72.6	56.8	74.2	2
Delhi	60.3	63.8	66.9	54.8	76.4	3
Punjab	58.7	66.7	63.3	75.8	66.6	4
Tripura	56.1		65.7	64.1	71.2	5
Haryana	49.7	62.4	63.4	63.7	73.1	6
Uttarakhand			59.3	53.4	70.8	7
Rajasthan	31.8	40.3	47.2	59.7	72.3	8
Sikkim		53.8	57.6	46.7	69.1	9
Assam	42.8	43.3	56.5	52.4	60.8	10
Mizoram	53.8	57.7	59.9	35.3	31.2	11
Manipur	34.9	38.7	48.7	23.6	61.3	12
Uttar Pradesh	19.8	28.1	43.6	45.5	62.4	13
Jharkhand			35.7	40.3	61.7	14
Arunachal Pradesh	23.6	35.4	43.2	31.6	59.1	15
Nagaland	13	30.3	29.7	26.5	57.4	16
Bihar	23.1	24.5	34.1	24	55.8	17
Meghalaya	20.7	20.2	24.3	24.3	27.4	18

Table 3.11 shows a constant increase in contraceptive usage in most states. The slight drop from NFHS-3 to NFHS-4 is questioned in the existing literature. Some researchers suggested it could be due to better survey rigor (reducing over-reporting), while others pointed to persistent unmet need and women's limited say in contraceptive decisions (Kumar et al., 2022). The data for some states is missing due to different reasons but it is important to note that most mountain societies underperform in this parameter. Mizoram and Manipur, especially showed a great drop from NFHS-3 (2005) to NFHS-4 (2015) which effected there rankings greatly. Most plains, however show high rates of contraceptive use consistently without varied fluctuations even across NFHS-3 to NFHS-4. Plain states like West Bengal, Himachal, Delhi and Haryana have shown better results than the mountain states. A major reason for this in existing literature

is the accessibility to the modern contraceptive methods in the remote mountain regions leading to a lesser usage.

3.6.3.5 Final Rank

The table 3.12 is made from the final rankings of the parameters described above and methodology used from section 3.5.2.2. For recap, each parameter is given the same weight in the ranking. A lower rank here indicates better performance. We can observe that the mountain states clearly outperform the plain states. In the bottom seven ranks, only one state is a mountain state. Apart from Punjab and Delhi, no plain state is a part of the top seven. This clearly shows that mountain states have better agency, freedom for women with lesser exploitation. The difference between plain and mountain states is noticed in various studies implicitly (Kishor & Gupta, 2004) but the reasons are varied. Better infrastructure, cultural reasons, more acceptance for women are cited to be the leading reasons. However, due to remoteness mountain regions often have modest infrastructure compared to their plain counterparts. The results here suggest that something more fundamental is at play. We will explore these reasons in the next chapter.

State	Final Rank
Himachal Pradesh	1
Mizoram	2
Delhi	3
Punjab	4
Sikkim	5
Manipur	6
Tripura	7
West Bengal	8
Nagaland	9
Uttarakhand	10
Meghalaya	11
Haryana	12
Assam	13
Arunachal Pradesh	14
Uttar Pradesh	15
Rajasthan	16
Jharkhand	17
Bihar	18

Table 3.12 Consolidated Final Ranks of States

Chapter 4

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4.1 Introduction

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4.2 Historical Case

Mountain regions historically have been hotbeds of political autonomy. Steep terrain and isolated valleys has allowed highland communities to resist control by plains. In Southeast Asia's highlands (Zomia) upland tribes have remained beyond the full reach of valley kingdoms. In the Philippines, the Igorot peoples of the Cordillera Mountains successfully resisted Spanish colonization for over three centuries in the northern Luzon (W. H. Scott, 1970). A long struggle ended in the Spanish ultimately failing to conquer these highlands by the end of colonial rule in 1898. Due to difficulty in conquering these regions lowlanders have been forced to enter into negotiations with the mountain people. For example, imperial china recognized local chieftains (tusi) in the southwestern mountains and allowed them authority in exchange for their allegiance (Took, 2005). // expand more?

4.3 Can Strategic Voting explain this?

Strategic voting is often used to explain Duverger's law as voters do not vote for their most preferred candidate or party but rather for a less-preferred option if that has a better chance of winning. India's case is different as there is a mixed evidence of strategic voting.

Chhibber uses SF ratio to show that strategic voting happens in masses in India. SF ratio is the ratio of votes obtained by the second loser to the first loser. Chhibber argues that if SF ratio is near 0 then there is strategic voting happening at significant levels and vice versa. However, SF ratio is argued not to be a reliable metric as Diwakar mentions

“SF ratio close to 1 (signifying a non-Duvergerian equilibrium) is possible in two situations: first, where the winning party secures a large majority of votes, leaving a very small proportion of votes for the other parties, and, second, where many parties share the votes in a closely fought election.”

Hence, SF ratio is not a reliable metric. While some studies show that Indian voters tend to be more strategic than expressive when their preferred party is unlikely to win (Choi, 2009), a recent study showed modest evidence for elite collusion explaining the voting patterns in India and also showed that strategic voting is practically absent in India (Ziegfeld, 2021). A case study on Uttar Pradesh (Heath & Ziegfeld, 2022) using survey data instead of statistical methods showed that there was no evidence for strategic voting and the majority of the people expected their party to win. The study was limited in scope due to its small sample set and evidence from one state only and Uttar Pradesh doesn't necessarily follow Duverger's law but it showed how the metrics used to evaluate strategic voting were weak and it was first of its kind to use survey data.

Hence, it can be argued that strategic voting cannot be the case necessarily in these states. India unlike other countries is very diverse with a very complex social fabric with various identities like caste, gender, tribal groups, religion, geography etc coming into play and has different reasons for divergence from Duverger's law apart from strategic voting. The case of a single identity being the reason behind explaining Duverger's law is not a new idea (Mayer, 2013) for India. Mayer analysed parameters like dummy candidates, spoiler candidates, regional parties etc and found the ratio of SC/ST i.e. caste and identity being a moderate reason behind the metric of effective parties.

Moving forward we try to present to explain how geography has effected politics in history and India. It is important to note that this can be one of the possible reasons, we are not directly drawing a causation based on the correlation and are just mentioning the theories that have argued for this in and outside India.

4.4 Indian Case

The division between mountain and plain societies has been evident in the Indian subcontinent since the colonial era. The British Empire in India governed the mountainous Northwest Frontier (today's Pakistan-Afghanistan border) through indirect means. British enforced the Frontier Crimes Regulations via local Pashtun maliks rather than imposing regular law. This meant more local autonomy for the Pashtun chieftains and acknowledged the difficulty of Britishers in gaining control (S. S. Ali & Rehman, 2013). This colonial arrangement remained in independent Pakistan as the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). This was a longstanding issue and Pakistan finally merged FATA into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2018 after

years of struggle and militancy (Horgan, 2008). A similar issue can be observed in the Jammu & Kashmir state of India where a special status under the Article 370 was granted to the state which was abruptly abolished in 2019. States have been forced to give away their autonomy and give local exemptions to incorporate these regions in the state. Article 371-A in India, gives Nagaland state control over its customary laws and land rights. Sikkim has been given special exemption from income tax laws as Sikkim operated under its own tax laws before it was merged into India in 1975. These exemptions were preserved under Article 371F of the Indian Constitution. Similarly, autonomous constituencies are present in Assam, Manipur and Ladakh to empower indigenous communities and ensure self-governance (n.d.). These councils can make laws on subjects such as land use, forest management, agriculture and village administration. They also have the authority to establish courts for cases involving tribal members, provided the sentences do not exceed five years of imprisonment. Apart from the provisions in the constitution there have been electoral difference in the voting patterns as explained in the results in the previous chapter.

4.5 Role of Identity politics in Mountains

The formation of identities is a continuous process often done as a response to external stimuli. The rise of different identities in the mountains and plains also points towards the difference in their behaviors too. Uttarakhand and Himachal saw a rise of distinct “pahari” identity (Mishra, 2000) which was different from the rise of caste politics in the plains. This is despite the fact that caste based cleavages existed in mountains too. Almost 50% of Himachal Pradesh consists of Rajput and Brahman’s combined. After Uttarakhand’s formation, it was noted that statehood actually accentuated the Pahar Maidan divide within Uttarakhand itself (Mathur, 2015). In recent news too Dehradun, Haridwar, and Udham Singh Nagar (plain districts of Uttarakhand) have experienced significant infrastructural and economic growth rather than the remote areas (Anab, n.d.). The formation of different identities in North East might seem similar to the caste cleavages present in the northern plains. However, it is important to note that these identities emerged as a result of geographic differences. The conflict between the hill and plains communities served as a crucial catalyst in the formation of distinct identities, particularly for the hill tribes who sought to differentiate themselves from the perceived cultural and political dominance of the plains populations. Due to the demand of Assamese as an official language the hill tribes especially felt threatened (Inoue, 2005). Hills were used as tool to resist against central powers as Nagas hid in the Naga Hills-Tuensang Area and Patkai mountain (Kapai, 2020). Due to these mountains being porous, it allowed for a 1600+ border to be open with Myanmar as Indian officials have officially acknowledged the difficulty in closing the same (Bureau, 2024). Scholars have argued the efficacy of statehood and autonomy arrangements. B. M. Pugh was a Khasi leader who was in favour of creating a state consisting of hill areas

only. He wished to combine present day Meghalaya, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram together but the motion didn't go through as the central government feared divisions on the basis of religious lines i.e. formation of a Christian state (Karlsson, 2013). The above discussion shows how the identities were developed as a result of conflict from hills. However, this led to the rise of ethnic conflicts among these tribes. The most violent can be Kuki and Naga as tensions rose in Manipur. Examples also include the long-standing demands for a separate state of Bodoland within Assam and the autonomy movement of the Karbi community (Sarma, 2017). Economic disparities also played an important role as hill tribes were often neglected and received minimal support making them feel alienated from the mainland India. Economic neglect was an important factor contributing to the rise of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) insurgency (Chima & Saikia, 2023). It is interesting to note what caused the rise of a separate strong hill identity across multiple states despite presence of strong ethnic divisions which effected the rest of India. This phenomenon is not uncommon to India and is seen throughout the world in "Maroon communities" or "undercommons" referenced in the literature review. India's case of Zomia and its consequences will be elaborated more in the next section.

4.6 Zomia

Zomia is a term coined in 2002 by Dutch scholar Willem van Schendel to describe a vast highland region on the fringes of South and Southeast Asia. The name derives from Zomi, meaning "highlander" in local Tibeto-Burman languages (Van Schendel, 2005). The evidence of mountain societies being structurally different from plains was seen in India where Van Schendel (Van Schendel, 2005) presents the idea of Zomia in which he argues that the borders drawn between major states are arbitrary and were without consideration of the social/cultural boundaries. Scott (J. C. Scott, 2009) elaborates on this and extends the existence of the Zomia framework, a stateless society which was the last escape zone and resisted incorporation into the power of state. In modern day, the Zomia region consists of the Mountains in North, North east of India, Tibet and mountainous regions of South east Asia (Himalayan mastiff). Initially the central Himalayas were not a part of this framework but studies show that the Zomia framework can be used to explain the Central Himalayas (Shneiderman, 2010). These remote areas in the Himalayan mastiff were often used to exile unwanted people due to religious and ethnic conflicts but Scott argues that it was actually the opposite. The majority people in these societies deliberately left the state in order to escape it and do trade without any restrictions and escape the crutches of hierarchical divisions and feudal governments to form more egalitarian governments which gave more freedom to women too. These areas were important passes and present on international routes and hence could be easily controlled. Due to their importance, attempts were made in history by kingdoms to incorporate them into states but mostly backfired

due to the extreme remote nature of these districts. Often these areas were ignored by scholars due to the remoteness and lack of documented history especially in the Chinese side of the Himalayas which has very strict rules for journalists and data collection. All these restrictions are increased due to the lack of knowledge about the language making it a difficult but important region to study. Although labeled backward/tribal by the state due to their limited history, Scott argues that they have deliberately avoided writing and not have written records. The oral history of these areas becomes an important aspect of study for us. He argues that such states tend to be politically different from the mainland and are egalitarian and free of the crutches of hierarchy like caste which is prevalent in mainlands of India. Although remote, this region has been a very important strategic location due to India and China in close contest against each other in this region who are trying to win over the locals to gain control over important geographical points and more natural resources like Brahmaputra river and its massive basin. The idea to control eastern Himalayas was conceived by the British but due to remoteness, the eastern Himalayas were the last regions not to be captured and trade routes were established to China through current day Assam along the Inner Line. The Inner Line was established in the Eastern Himalayan frontier to regulate movement and interaction between the plains of Assam and the tribal areas of the hills. Post independence, the NEFA (North-East Frontier Agency), present day Arunachal Pradesh was a contested territory between India and China. Both the states were trying to appease the locals and establish control (Guyot-Rechard, 2017). This control is often achieved by building “spheres of influence” around important nodes and grow them (Farrelly, 2013). In India, Miao in Arunachal Pradesh is an important node of control for the state to gain access to the otherwise remote region. Even though remote there are tools like all season roads, circuit houses and especially schools and colonies of government officials used by government to spread its influence. District collectors are often appointed from the state of Arunachal or Assam to woo the locals which provides the much needed local support and legitimacy to the Indian government.

“The region has never been united politically, neither as an empire nor as a space shared among a few feuding kingdoms, nor even as a zone with harmonized political systems. Forms of distinct customary political organizations, chiefly lineage-based versus ‘feudal’ unlike plains where feudal systems developed and were controlled by a small elite. They subjugated egalitarian groups in their orbit, but never united, and were never totally integrated into surrounding polities.” - (Michaud, 2017)

Even though the existence of Zomia shows political distinctiveness from plains, Scott presents that this was till 1950 only. After that with technological innovations and Zomia becoming a contested area as it became part of borderlands, states quickly developed to incorporate them into their structure and the Zomia came to an end. However with development of inter-border roads scholars have presented that this might have reopened the debate of Zomia as the state

built infrastructure facilitates the movement between these areas opening new opportunities for these markets and areas (Murton, 2013).

These instances of marginalization and exclusion are not confined to Indian territory. They are also evident in Gilgit-Baltistan, a mountainous region in Pakistan where the local population has often felt disconnected from mainland Pakistan. Among the natives of the region there is a sense of betrayal or “khelna” against the Pakistani government due to the neglect and systemic exclusion. Scholars and authors have highlighted that this divide is partly rooted in religious-sect differences as Gilgit-Baltistan is predominantly Shia while the rest of Pakistan is Sunni-dominated. However, it is also argued that geography plays a significant role in this dynamic. The region’s remote, rugged terrain has made it difficult to integrate fully into the national framework increasing the feeling of isolation and alienation (N. Ali, 2019). Similarly, in the Hunza region of Northern Pakistan remoteness is not just a geographical condition but it has been used as a strategic tool for bargaining. Perceived as savage and dangerous by the colonialists during the British occupation (similar to Zomia), it has used remoteness to promote tourism in the region extensively as a “lost paradise”. It has also become an important strategic location and due to technological advances it now has satellite guided missiles, highways etc (Hussain, 2015). This is similar to what happened to remote regions in India, especially the Arunachal Pradesh.

Geography affecting politics can be seen in the modern day as well and its not necessary for the terrains to be vastly different, even small variations like hills and its valleys can show a difference. It is also not necessary for it to happen at a macro level, differences among people due to geography can be seen at a state level in India. In this section we will explain a few case studies in India where this difference is present.

4.7 Structural Differences

Zomia has also presented on how the plains and mountains are different. In this section we will focus on the gender and political differences of the mountains and plains. Scott has argued that mountain societies are more egalitarian and in some cases also have matrilineal kinship patterns. This is in contrast with the plain societies which are starkly different due to their patrilineal and male-centered lineage systems. This is clearly evident in the kinship and family structures of the mountain societies. For example, in Meghalaya the Khasi and Garo tribes are matrilineal. The youngest daughter inherits all ancestral property, children bear the mother’s surname and husbands move into the wife’s maternal home after marriage (Allen, 2012). Lowland state societies influenced by Confucian, Hindu or Islamic law tended to formalize male authority in family and property matters (e.g. requiring sons for inheritance, emphasizing female chastity and patrilocal marriage. These kinship laws have been there for

centuries and are still seen in the modern day. It is important to note that this was not limited to kinship laws only. Women's economic roles in mountain communities have generally been as prominent as men's. Women would take charge of household gardens and tend to them. As highland societies were mostly self reliant, women's labor was more visible and indispensable giving them a better economic status. This is not only visible in the Khasi society but it is also seen in the Lahu people of southwest China (a Tibeto-Burman hill group). Lahu men and women share responsibilities in farming, decision-making, and a married couple is considered a single social unit in community affairs Du, 2015. This egalitarian labor partnership has persisted among the Lahu despite pressures from the patriarchal Chinese state over the last two centuries. Plains have often restricted the role of women to childbearing, homes and informal markers which makes their value invisible in the economic markets. Additionally, premarital sex by women might be socially tolerated and women can remarry without stigma. This is seldom allowed in orthodox lowland cultures that emphasized female chastity and one-time marriage alliances (often for political or economic gain) Men generally hold position of responsibilities in public spaces, politics etc. The power dynamics between genders in upland societies tend to be more fluid, with women often having greater informal influence than in lowland patriarchies. Some highland cultures even allow women to serve as clan heads or spiritual leaders. For example, numerous ethnic groups in the Southeast Asian Massif have traditions of female shamans or oracles who guide communal spiritual life. State-sanctioned religions often excluded women from leadership (e.g. only men could become Buddhist monks of high rank or Confucian scholars). In valley societies it is important to note the difference between matrilineal and matriarchy. In the above mentioned example of matrilineal societies of Khasi hills, men were often allowed to control the village councils (dorbar) News & Media, 2011; Post, n.d. In lowland societies women's autonomy was often curbed by stricter marriage customs, purdah or seclusion practices (in some Hindu and Muslim kingdoms). This was often accompanied by the expectation to obey fathers and husbands codified in law Devi & Kaur, 2019; Papanek, 1973.

As Scott argued that plains and mountains are structurally different, social differences like difference between kinship and family structures, economic freedom of women and matrilineal social norms were not the only differences observed between the Zomia and lowland areas. These regions also diverged in their political structures and hierarchies. In the Zomia framework, mountain societies tend to be more decentralized, mobile, and egalitarian, while plain societies are more settled. Plain societies are characterized with more centralized authority and rigid hierarchies (Hammond, 2011).

// add point of zomia people being away from the plains

Political organization in the hills tends to be local and kinship-based (village councils, clan elders, tribal chiefs) rather than the hierarchical structures and a top down bureaucracy. Many highland groups formed "egalitarian or acephalous" communities with no permanent chiefs or

with only weak leadership roles. Scholars have argued that this was a deliberate choice among these societies. In general, Zomia’s highlanders “paid neither taxes to monarchs nor regular tithes to a permanent religious establishment”. This is opposite to the valley people who were often forced to pay taxes to the church and the state. Local moneylenders often worsened the situation by employing brute force to collect taxes, which were considered a birthright of the monarchy. For example, the *jizya* tax was imposed on non-Muslims and the development of the *zabt* system and the *dahsala* taxation method during the medieval period (Moosvi, 1973). Highland societies often favoured mobility which led to the development of practicing shifting cultivation or the slash and burn agriculture. These crops are easy to scatter and harvest at different times, making it hard for would-be tax collectors to confiscate a single big harvest. The lowland states depended on intensive agriculture (irrigated rice, canals, dams) which became the primary reason for the central administration and stationary peasant communities. Scott further explains in his series of lectures (J. C. Scott, 2005) about how the hill people were incredibly diverse as they spoke hundreds of distinct languages and dialect. Some groups like Akha of Burma and the Hani of China shared similar origins (Boonyasaranai, 2014) but diverged with time and became culturally distinct. Due to numerous groups and small amount of groups, no group emerged on top. The highlanders refusal to homogenize or fully embrace lowland identities was another form of political defiance. Lowland states typically saw the surrounding hills as lawless peripheries to be exploited or pacified when possible. Valleys would often conduct slave raids to exploit the highlands and loot their resources (Walker, 1999). Captives from hill tribes were used either as slaves or soldiers forcefully into the state societies. Temporary alliances between these two societies were made but these arrangements were often fragile and broke quickly. Zomia has shown us how there were cultural and political divides between the mountain and plains.

4.8 Case Study of Indian States

In this section we will look at specific states in India where these differences have manifested. These case studies are helpful as a lot of mountain states in India were formed after breaking away from plain societies. The politics around these revolved a lot around the geography of the states.

4.8.1 Himachal Pradesh

Himachal Pradesh is a state dominant with highlands and the political landscape has shown distinct regional patterns based on differences in geography. The state emerged from the Simla presidency in 1947 with minimal political organization. However, in 1966 state reorganization marked an important turning point and created a distinct divide between “old Himachal” (old mountainous regions) and “new Himachal” (merged areas like Kangra and its valley

region)(SHARMA, 1987). This division was amplified by resource allocation issues particularly water distribution. The older regions became Congress strongholds and were reluctant to share resources with newer areas and fund allocation based on population often disadvantaged the newer regions. The newer agricultural zones became BJP strongholds after the party successfully mobilized local pressure groups. Attempts by parties like BSP and Himachal Vikas Congress to establish themselves have been unsuccessful (Chauhan & Ghosh, 2004). This is also visible in the development model proposed by Yashwant Singh Parmar who was the first chief minister of Himachal Pradesh. He presented to the government that a “plains oriented model of development” would not work for the state. The government at that time in their five year plan proposed to focus on industrialization. However, in Himachal the proposed to focus on rural roads, horticulture, and social services rather than heavy industrialization. To include the remote areas like Lahaul Spiti, Kangra which could be seen as “Zomia pockets” of Himachal a special force named Task Force on the Development of Tribal Areas and an Expert Committee on Tribal Development were created. Under the program border roads were built to connect these regions and were coerced into the state structure without much resistance (for State Effectiveness, 2020). The state has allowed them to retain their cultural autonomy leading to the formation of “microcosms”. Microcosms are defined as “A small, self-contained world that reflects or represents a larger system or reality”. For example the village of Malana in Kullu district also known as the “hermit village” has its own ancient council and deity governance. Malana has a historically had a great autonomy under their deity Jamlu and even kept the Kullu raja at bay. Malana has argued to be one of the longest surviving Zomia pocket but it is now slowly being brought into the state control with them sending representatives to the Panchayat and when the authorities interrupted their cannabis cultivation (Axelby, 2015). Thus, in Himachal the trend has been consolidation of state authority in the mountains, balanced by respect for local culture.

4.8.2 Manipur

Manipur presents itself as a very interesting case as it has a clear geographic difference. Inside Manipur is a valley which is surrounded by the hills on all its sides. This is even visible in the lok sabha elections as it has two constituencies Inner and Outer Manipur. After Manipur became a full state in 1972, the hill tribes suddenly found themselves under a state government largely run by valley elites (the Meitei, who are not tribals). They were seen as an extension of the colonial rule which didn’t settle with the hill tribes. In the Naga areas of Manipur’s hills, the Naga National Council (NNC) and later the NSCN (National Socialist Council of Nagalim) propagated the idea of “Greater Nagaland” (Nagalim) to unite Naga-inhabited hills across Manipur, Nagaland, and Burma. Even the structure of governance is different in the plains and mountains. Imphal valley has a strong presence of state structure with government run schools, police stations etc. However, the hill area is a part of Autonomous District Councils

to give them more freedom to take their own decisions. In India, Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) are “constitutionally recognized bodies established under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution”. . However, Manipur’s ADCs have relatively constrained powers and have often been defunct or boycotted for periods. Additionally, land ownership in the hills is governed by customary law and even people from Imphal valley cannot buy land in hills under the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act (MLR and LR) of 1960. Manipur state government has historically not interfered with tribal land.

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Imphal valley enjoys relatively better infrastructure whereas as the hill areas lag in healthcare, infrastructure and economic opportunities creating more unrest. (Lacina, 2009)

Manipur highlands are politically, structurally and government wise different from the valley. This resonates strongly with Zomia as the “zones of refuge” which have directly avoided a centralised state power.

The government structures and laws to protect the rights of the indigenous tribe shows that it is different from Himachal and even though both of them have small pockets which have resisted state influence, there methods are different. Highlanders in Manipur managed to bargain for more autonomy given there special status in the constitution but it has led to more violence and division in the state.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

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